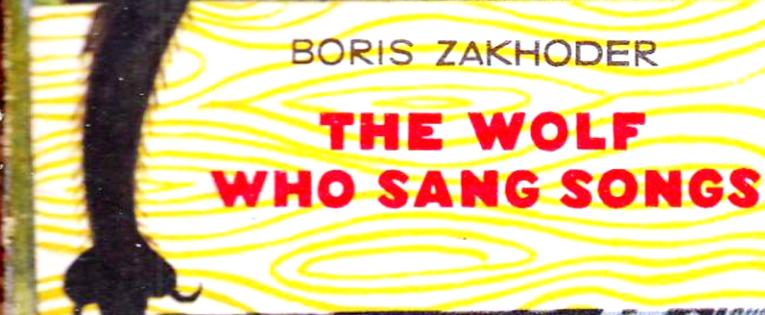




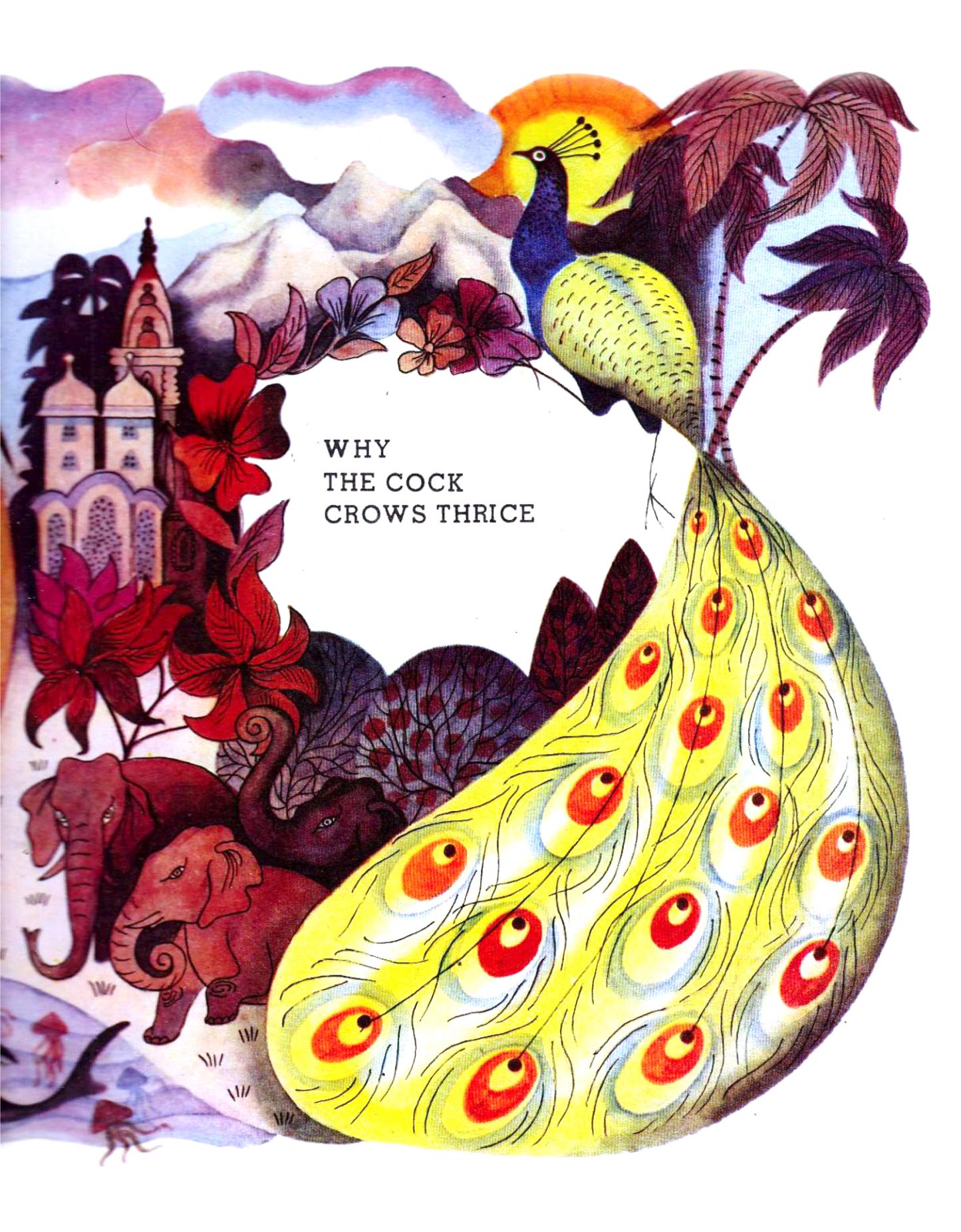
BORIS ZAKHODER

**THE WOLF
WHO SANG SONGS**



Translated from the Russian by Avril Pyman





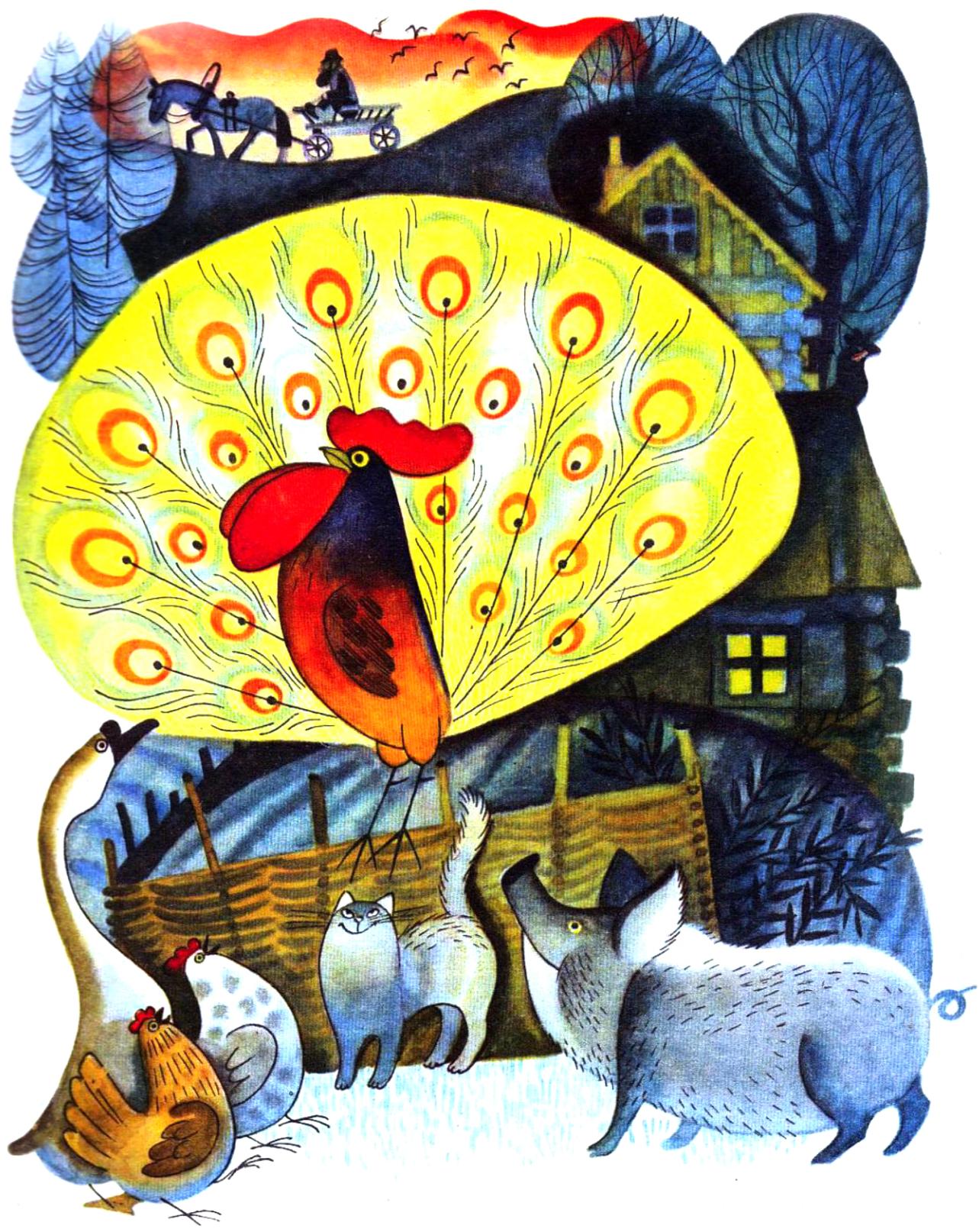
WHY
THE COCK
CROWS THRICE



In the olden days, the Cock had the most beautiful tail: dark blue with splotchy patterns and fine traceries of brilliant colour. The Peacock, on the other hand, was dock-tailed. He did have a tail of sorts, but it looked more like a mistake.

The Peacock was envious of the Cock. One day he came up to him and said:

"Cock, nice Cock! Lend me your tail. I've got to go to a wedding and I do so want to dress up fine for it."



"What an idea," said the Cock. "Whoever heard of lending a tail?"

"But I'll give it back!" said the Peacock.

"When?"

"When I get back from the wedding of course."

"And when will that be?"

"Depending on how the wedding goes! This evening, or at midnight, or perhaps we'll be making merry till dawn."

"Well, no later then," said the Cock, "or the hens will laugh at me in the morning."

The Peacock promised him to give back the tail.

The Cock gave him his tail. The Peacock put it on — and took himself off.

The Cock was left without any tail at all, waiting for the Peacock to come back from the wedding. Evening came, the sun went down—and no Peacock.

The Cock hopped up onto the fence and gave two or three loud crows, but the Peacock did not come. "He must be having a good time at that wedding," thought the Cock. The hens had already gone to roost, and the Cock dozed off too. He dozed and dozed, but all the time he never quite forgot about his tail. Soon it was midnight, such pitchy darkness you couldn't see your hand before your face. "Oh dear," thought the Cock, "I hope the Peacock doesn't get lost on the way back from the wedding." He shook himself and started to crow. He crowed and he crowed, but no! There was no sign of the Peacock.

Again the Cock dozed off, but he was restless: worried about his tail. He dreamt that the Peacock had been attacked by robbers on his way back from the wedding, and they had taken his tail.

At first light the Cock woke with a start. Was the Peacock still not back? No! Again he began to crow:

"Cock-a-doodle-doo! Peacock-a-cock-acoo! Come here!"

What a hope! Overnight the Peacock had made off to India, and there he stayed. Never to be seen again in those parts.

Many years passed, much water flowed under the bridges, the Cock grew a new tail, but still he missed the old one.

And so, ever since, he has called three times every night. After all, you never can tell... some day the Peacock may bring back his tail: what do you think?







THE FOX'S RULING



It happened long, long ago at a time when wild animals could talk and even the trees put in a word every now and again.

A peasant was walking through the wood when he saw that a great tree had fallen and was crushing a snake under one heavy branch. The snake was struggling and writhing but could not break free.

She saw the peasant and called out to him:

"Have pity on me, help me to get free! I shall know how to show my gratitude."

The peasant took pity on the snake and raised the branch. Now the snake was a poisonous one. No sooner was she free than—pshsh!—She was up onto his shoulders, had wound herself round his neck and was hissing in his ear:

"Now I shall bite you!"

So much for the gratitude of snakes!

The peasant said:



"You should be ashamed of yourself, Viper, I have saved you from death and you want to kill me!"

But the snake only repeated: "I'll bite, I'll bite!"

"Oh no, you don't," said the peasant. "that won't do at all. Let us call in a judge. He will give us a ruling which of us is right. We'll ask the first person we see."

The snake agreed. They went into the forest and who should they meet but Red Fox.

They told her exactly what had happened.

"Be our judge, Red Fox," said the peasant. "Only judge fairly, in good faith."

"All right," the Fox replied. "I'll be your judge. Only I can't give you a quick verdict, just like that. First I must see exactly what happened. Let's go back to the place where you first fell out with one another. I'll give you my ruling there."

They came back to where they had started. Judge Fox said:

"Now go back to the places where you both were when the disagreement began."

The peasant raised the branch, the snake slid back to where she had been and he immediately let go the branch so that the snake was again trapped.

"And now," said Judge Fox, "get out as best you can, Viper! That's my ruling."

I don't know about the snake, but the peasant was quite satisfied.

"Thank you," he said. "Thank you, Judge Fox, for judging between us so fairly, in good faith!"

The Fox answered:

"Not so fast! Oh no, you won't get away with just a 'thank you'. I shall require a sack of good things from you for my trouble."

The peasant was surprised:

"We never made any such bargain," he said.

But the Fox persisted: give, give, give!

"So that's the sort you are!" thought the peasant. "Well, just you wait. I'll teach you a lesson."

"All right," he said. "Let's go back to my house. I'll give you a sack of good things."

He went back home, bundled his dogs in a sack, tied it up tightly and carried it out to the Fox.

The Fox was delighted for the sack was very heavy. "Aha," thought the Fox. "The peasant's been really generous!"

She shouldered the sack and made off to her lair. But curious to see what was inside she sat down on the road and untied the sack. Out leapt the dogs and attacked her, tearing her fur coat to shreds.

The Fox ran home and set licking at her torn fur and muttering to herself:

"My Grandfather was never a judge and my father was never a judge, so why the devil did I go setting myself up as one?"







THE WOLF
WHO
SANG
SONGS



Once upon a time, in the forest, there lived a grey wolf, enormously fierce. He lived all right, but for everyone else in the neighbourhood life was not worth living.

It was not just that he behaved like a regular brigand, dragging off good and bad alike to his lair: it was the dreadful way he would howl. Other wolves only howl when they're hungry, but this shaggy old bandit would kill a calf, gorge himself sick on it, and then strike up a song. A wolf, of course, only has the one song:

"I'll kill you-ou-ou! I'll eat you-ou-ou!"

So terrifying and repulsive was his howling that all the creatures—except of course, Screech Owl and Tawny Owl—tried everything to stop their ears from it. Yet he seemed to revel in it: he would pause for breath and then strike up the same old song.

"Oo-oo-oooooo! I'll do you-ou-ououou!"

Well, once he had been howling in this way all night. He howled and howled and only fell silent towards morning when at last he fell asleep. He would have slept all day long, but the sun rose and sent a warm ray to tickle his nose.



Grey Wolf was so sleepy he thought it was a fly and snapped at it! Nothing there — only his teeth clashed together; a second time he snapped ... missed again; a third time ... and bit his own tongue. By then he was wide awake and Red Fox happened to be passing by carrying a fat hen.

"Hi, Grey Wolf," she called. "No more sleep for you! What do you think you're doing snoring your head off when there's a flock of sheep grazing in the glade down by the stream and no shepherds or dogs! Over there!" At that Grey Wolf forgot all about sleep.

"Is that trrrue?" he snarled.

But why should Red Fox lie? She knew what she was talking about.

Grey Wolf sped off in the direction she had pointed out and, sure enough, there were the sheep, about a hundred and fifty of them all on their ownomes....

They saw the wolf, trembled and huddled together in a solid mass. There they stood, poor things, bleating away and expecting every moment to be their last....

Grey Wolf licked his chops: "A-a-a!" he snarled. "Now I'll eat you all up!"

And he would have, too, only suddenly one sheep stepped out from among the others, bowed to Grey Wolf and said:

"You can eat us any time you like, Sir. But if your Mercy would be so good—"

"Mercy?" the wolf snarled. "What mercy do you ask of Grey Wolf?"

"Well, you see, Sir, it's like this: We have no one to give us the note when we sing. Don't take it personally, please, but we enjoy singing, too. We used to have a choir-leader—a ram with a great voice, almost as loud as yours, but they drove him away somewhere. Wouldn't you help us to get our choir going again? You

could always eat us afterwards! It would be no trouble for you: you are such a famous musician, we hear you every night, can't sleep for listening to you!"

Grey Wolf was most flattered: "Really, you can't sleep?"

"How could we think of sleeping!" replied the sheep. "We don't get a wink, Sir, really we don't!"

"Hm! All right then," said Grey Wolf. "I don't see why not. Only mark you all do as I say, or I'll do you!"

Grey Wolf climbed up onto the stump of a tree and started up his usual song:

"I'll kill you-ou-ou! I'll eat you-ou-ou!"

And the sheep, all in chorus, responded:

"M-m-m-misery, m-m-m-e! La-a-ack-a-day de-e-e-e!"

"Wrong!" yelled Grey Wolf. "Less noise from the basses there! Let's hear the descant!"

And off he went again: "Oo-oo-oo-oo-ooh!"

And the sheep: "Ba-a-a! Ma-a-aa!"

They made such a din that soon they had roused the whole village and people and dogs came running from all sides.

And that was the end of the wolf who sang songs.





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